

Overview

In 1994, National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW) was declared to focus local and national attention on the importance of proper immunization for infants and toddlers 24 months and under. Since its inception, National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW) has served as a call to parents, caregivers, and healthcare providers to participate in activities and recognition events to increase the awareness of immunizing children before their second birthday.

NIIW scheduled for April 13-19, 2003, is a time to highlight our past achievements and focus our efforts on future endeavors to continue to raise immunization coverage levels. This year's theme is "Love Them. Protect Them. Immunize Them." We celebrate with our partners the accomplishments that would not have occurred without successful collaboration.

The goals of NIIW are to:

- Make parents, caregivers and health care providers aware of the need to protect their children from birth against 11 vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Encourage better communication between parents and caregivers and their health care provider about a child's vaccination needs.
- Inform parents and caregivers of the need to check their children's immunization records and follow through on childhood immunization recommendations by making and keeping the needed appointments.
- Increase parents and caregiver's awareness of and access to resources such as toll-free 800 numbers, to help them locate local facilities offering free or low-cost immunizations for their children if they do not have insurance or a health care provider.

The objectives for NIIW are to:

- Work with state and local health departments and a local coalition to develop and implement a local communication strategy to increase awareness of the importance of immunization and improve local immunization coverage rates as measured by the National Immunization Survey.
- Create a media event to increase national and local media interest in infant immunization.
- Provide a forum to pitch news stories, provide a media hook to interest local media in developing feature stories on the importance of childhood immunization, and create opportunities for local media interviews with immunization experts.
- Recognize partners and volunteers for their efforts in helping to raise childhood coverage.
- Create opportunities for local coalition building.

Key Messages for NIIW include:

- Immunizations are one of the most important ways parents can protect their children against serious diseases.
- Each day 11,000 babies are born who will need to be immunized against eleven diseases before age two.
- We can now prevent more diseases than ever before. Because we can prevent more diseases, parents are often not aware of what it takes to fully immunize a child.
- Infants and young children are particularly vulnerable to infectious diseases; that is why it is critical that they are protected through immunization.
- Parents and caregivers need to take responsibility for their child's vaccinations. They are encouraged to become informed consumers and keep a record of each immunization visit.
- Immunization protects families and communities. Children who are not immunized increase the chance that others will get the disease.
- Immunizations are extremely safe thanks to advancements in medical research and ongoing review by doctors, researchers, and public health officials.
- Children are far more likely to be harmed by serious infectious diseases than by immunization.

Every individual and community, large and small, can take an active roll in the reduction and prevention of vaccine-preventable diseases and celebrate NIIW. Harness the power of your community by brining together local groups, organizations, businesses, hospitals, day care centers, churches, providers, political leaders and the media to plan local NIIW activities. Below are a few ways in which *you* and your community can participate in NIIW. Please review the section titled, "***Preparing for NIIW,***" for an extensive list of NIIW ideas, activities, and program planning tips.

Community

- Plan a NIIW kick-off event with your local partners that include activities such as a news conference or an immunization fair that will encourage the participation of parents and attract media attention.
- Arrange for your mayor or governor to sign a NIIW proclamation.
- Organize an awards/appreciation luncheon or dinner to recognize community and business leaders who have demonstrated excellence in raising local immunization rates.
- Work with local churches, schools, social and civic organizations, and businesses to develop a healthy neighborhood plan that includes promoting timely immunizations.
- Organize a door-to-door educational campaign to raise awareness about the importance of timely immunization.
- Form a speaker's bureau consisting of local teachers, providers, political leaders, and clergy to give seminars and presentations on immunization.

- Work with the local health department to develop an immunization awareness council whose goal is to promote activities that increase immunization rates.
- Develop public service announcements to air on local television and radio stations.
- Solicit donations or in-kind gifts from local businesses to offset printing and distribution costs of immunization educational materials.
- Encourage your organization and your partner agencies to show their support for infant immunization. Disseminate valuable infant immunization information to the public by posting the official NIIW icon your website and linking to the national NIIW information page. For details visit the website link icon area at <http://www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/niiw>.

Providers

- Encourage local hospitals to conduct grand rounds focusing on infant and childhood immunization.
- Persuade hospitals and health maintenance organizations to promote immunization in prenatal classes and during prenatal visits.
- Provide after-hours and weekend immunization services to reduce wait times and eliminate access barriers.
- Implement an immunization reminder system.
- Create and maintain a patient-friendly environment and provide culturally appropriate immunization education materials.
- Hold in service training seminars focusing on record-keeping, eliminating access barriers and reminder-recall systems for medical, health and social service agencies.

Parents and Caregivers

- Keep an immunization record and update it on every doctor's visit.
- Encourage effective communication between parents and caregivers and their health providers.
- Write an article or editorial for the local newspaper.
- Work with local health departments, clinics, and hospitals to promote neighborhood clinics.
- Work with local media to sponsor an immunization awareness campaign.
- Distribute immunization material to social service agencies and other community agencies that serve children, such as foster homes, refugee centers, homeless shelters, day care programs, schools, churches, libraries, and hospitals. Encourage agencies to share this information with parents of children 24 months and under through website postings, newsletters and bulletin boards.